

JOSEPH THOMAS SHERIDAN LE FANU

SPALATRO - FROM THE NOTES OF BROTHER GIACOMO

PART ONE

The Spalatro, surnamed Barbone, of whom we speak, was not the illustrious bandit of Napoleon's early time, who assumed, or acquired, that name, but the celebrated original, who first bore it two centuries since. This man was nobly born, lost his parents early, squandered his fortune, and then "took to the road" professionally. He speedily became one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, of Italian robbers of any age. His followers were so numerous, so well armed, and so hardy, that none of the states cared unnecessarily to meddle with him, but contented themselves with acting to the best of their ability upon the defensive; it is even said that *Venice* allowed this desperado a secret stipend upon the condition that her territories should be exempted from his depredations; however this may be, it is certain that he made himself so universally dreaded, that but for his singular rashness, he might have lived in as much security, and died in as much splendour, as ever did an absolute prince. He was, however, foolish enough to visit the city of St. Mark during the carnival, and happening to quarrel with a party of young fellows, he killed three of them, but being overpowered by numbers, was taken, and after a protracted examination before the state inquisition, was executed between the pillars in the piazetta, beside the Doge's palace.

In the hall of the grand council, in the ducal palace, whither, upon the suppression of the republic, the famous library of St. Mark was transferred, the reader, should he happen to visit it, will find at the right of the great entrance, a series of huge tomes, in which are bound up a heterogeneous mass of manuscripts of all kinds — poems, chronicles, and church music. Among them he will discover a voluminous collection, in the handwriting of one who calls himself "Fra Giacomo, the humblest of the servants of God, and of the republic, and messenger of peace to the victims of justice." He appears for many years to have acted as confessor to the state prisoners of Venice, and jotted down, in his own hand, abundant notes of the secrets of which he thus became possessed.

On this day, writes brother Giacomo, I visited, for the fourth time, the renowned and unhappy Spalatro. He is the boldest criminal I ever spoke with; there is not in him the fear of death or the fear of God. He will neither pray, nor confess, nor have any of the rites of the church. Yesterday as I talked with him in the prison, he fell suddenly upon the floor in a fit of epilepsy, to which it seems he has been long subject. When he was somewhat recovered I began to argue with him on his hardened state of wickedness, and asked him if he never thought how he should fare in the other world, were death to come in one of these fearful seizures; to which he answered readily and coolly, that he knew well how he should fare, and had no need to inquire; thereupon I talked to him long and seriously, and he listened and answered with more respect than heretofore: he told me that he believed in the existence of God, and in that of the devil, but that he thought little about the Christian religion, having no interest in it. He went on with much excitement, and among other strange things he said— "Were I to tell you why I believe in the great spirits I have named, you would think me mad. I have seen things, these eyes have seen them, which my lips shall never tell. Were I to speak them, you and all other men would laugh at me, and you would pronounce the Truth, because it is unlike what you are in the habit of seeing every day, an impossibility and a lie; but of this be assured, that I know better than any other man can what is in store for me; as for your prayers, and relics, and solemnities, I hold them in mere contempt. You can alter no man's condition. You and your fraternity of monks could more easily dislodge the island upon whose breast this prison sits, than sway in the least degree the immutable destiny of a human soul, or bring its future dwelling one inch nearer to heaven, or farther from hell — tush! I know more of these matters than half your divines."

When I visited him to-day, this most unfortunate and sinful man was in extraordinary spirits, and full of jests and levity. I was so disgusted with this, that I was about to leave the cell, when he requested me to stay, at the same time apologising for his thoughtlessness, and assuring me he meant no offence. When he chooses he can be very courteous and even engaging. I staid with him for a long time, and he has told me the story of his life. Gracious God! such a story. I feel like one just awakened from a fearful dream. I cannot believe, and yet I know not how to reject it. The tale was told with groans, and tears, and tremblings, and agonies of excitement. My mind is full of doubts and fears. I have no more certainty, no more *knowledge*, mystery and illusion are above, and below, and around me. May God sustain me else my mind will be lost, irrevocably lost in the abyss of horror. The narrative was as follows, I give his own words as nearly as I can: —

"My mother was a lady of high birth, and of some fortune; she married, when a mere girl, a French nobleman, Count d'Orbois. This marriage was in every way unfortunate. The count was attached to the French court, whither he took his lady, and having been thus separated from her friends, she was speedily made to feel the dependence of her condition in the bitter sense of conjugal indifference and desertion. Under these ill auspices, which my after life in no part belied, I entered the world, and forty-eight hours after my birth my father, who had never set eyes upon me, having gambled all night with ill success, fought two duels in the morning, in the second of which he was so unfortunate as to be run twice through the body, and killed on the spot. My mother returned to Rome with some small wreck of property, and after two years of widowhood, being a person of singular beauty, agreeable and lively manners, and of unexceptionable birth, she was proposed for by the Marchese Picardi, and accepted him. My earliest recollections are associated with the noble scenery of the Apennines, to the eastward of Rome, and not far from Celano. There in the grand old castle, which has for ages belonged to the Picardi family, I passed the early and the only happy years of my existence. Here, however, I lost my best and tenderest friend, the only one who ever cared very much about me — my mother. She died when I was about six years of age, having had, by her second marriage two children — a son and a daughter. My step-father, for he soon made it plain that he was resolved to be no more to me, was a man of a naturally cold and somewhat stern temper. He did not love me, and his preference of the others, however natural, galled and wounded me. I resolved, so soon as I should have the right to demand the small sum of money which was my only inheritance, to claim it, and depart for ever from the castle. The feelings of pride and mortification in which this resolution had taken its rise, were far,

however, from being always present to my mind. I loved my sister and my brother too — selfish though he was I loved him. I do believe, good father, that I might have been a worthy man, as men go, were it not for a certain pride, which rose into madness even under the show of wrong or oppression, and a kind of ardour and impetuosity which left no room for rest or caution. Although, as I have said, the Marquis Picardi refused me any place in his affections, he did not suffer me to want such an education as became a gentleman. Nor were my instructions confined to the mere corporal accomplishments of fencing, horsemanship, and the like; on the contrary, the larger portion of my time was devoted to intense and ardent study. My instructor in all intellectual pursuits was an old monk, from the neighbouring monastery of Carmelites; and as some strange adventures in my after life were connected with this man, you will excuse me if I describe him briefly. He was a man of great age, his features were commanding and classic, his forehead was bold and intellectual, and furrowed with lines of deep thought; the baldness of age had supplanted the tonsure, a few locks of snow-white hair, venerably covered his temples, and a long and singularly handsome beard of the same pure white, fell upon his bosom. His figure was rather tall, though slight, and might once have been athletic, but how it was bowed under the weight of years. Clothed in the brown habit of his order, it were hard to conceive a more picturesque impersonation of reverend age. One relic of departed youth alone remained to this venerable man, it was the fiery vivacity of an eye, which seemed as though it had never rested or grown dim — an eye under whose glance the buried secrets of the heart arose and showed themselves, which nothing could baffle or escape. This man, brother Anthony, as they called him in the monastery, was, as I have said, my instructor, and a more learned or subtle, but at the same time a more *unchristian* one could scarcely have been found. He had in me an ardent and, I believe, by no means an unapt pupil; but in dealing his instructions he had a strange delight in setting my mind to work upon subjects which I verily believe no human mind could bear. The fearful themes of time and eternity, and the Godhead in its vastest attributes, were topics in which he loved to engage the faculties of my mind; and I, entangled in the mazy subtleties of his reasoning, or overwhelmed by the magnitude of conceptions after which my mind strained, but which it had not scope or power to comprehend, felt myself often confounded and appalled to a degree which merged upon madness, in such moments the old monk would forget his gravity, and, leaning back in his chair, indulge in an excess of merriment, which little tended to compose my nerves; and strange to say, though I again and again resolved against conversing upon such matters, yet the old man, whenever he pleased, which was often enough, led me to them, as if to make sport for himself out of the perplexities and terrors in which such discourse never failed to involve me. He had, too, a strange pleasure in unsettling all the most established convictions of my mind, and in thus plunging me into an abyss of fearful uncertainty and scepticism from which I have never quite escaped. This kind of metaphysical conversation he not unfrequently seasoned with indirect and artful ridicule of religion, urging, too, in terms which scarcely affected disguise, a philosophy of sensuality unparalleled even in the doctrines of Epicurus. He had, however, in a remarkable degree, the Satanic art of clothing vice in the fairest disguise; and being himself so old as to have no individual interest, further than the inculcation of abstract truth, in the doctrines which he broached, they found the easier access to my mind. It is scarcely wonderful then, if in the hands of such a teacher, so far from acquiring any higher morality, even my natural sense of right and wrong became confused and blunted. This old man, corrupt in heart and powerful in understanding, acquired a strong control over me. I had no affection for him — such a feeling toward him were impossible; cold and full of satire, his nature exhibited to the eye of youth no one quality which was not essentially repulsive; he had yet such intellectual attributes as to fascinate and command. There was, too, between the situation and the character of the man, a strange and mysterious inconsistency, which filled me with a deep and indefinable interest. Than his station, garb, and habits of life, nothing could be more humble; than his appearance, nothing more worn and aged — yet there were ever breaking from him, not the aspirations of ambition, but the reckless scoffings of conscious and established superiority, and while all his feelings seemed to have withered into the scorched and bitter selfishness of age, his mental faculties were endued with preterhuman energy, and an activity nothing short of stupendous —

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“I was ascending the great stairs of the castle, when methought I heard a shriek. I paused, I listened, I *did* hear a shriek, and another, and another, in quick succession. It was my sister’s voice; I hurried towards her room. Several passages I had to traverse on the way; the screams were louder and more rapid, I reached the door, it was fast; I rushed against it and stood in the chamber. Heavens! what did I behold—my sister with hair dishevelled, struggling, terrified, locked in the grasp of the aged wretch, my instructor.

“You see this arm, good father, it was then as lusty and as sinewy as now; with all the force that frenzy gave, I struck the old villain in the face. I might as well have smitten a rock — he turned upon me like a beast at bay. I heard steps in the passage — servants were approaching, but before they entered the chamber the old man grappled with me, and seizing me by the throat, to my shame be it spoken, hurled me with tremendous force senseless upon the floor. When I came to myself the old friar had made his escape, and neither at the castle nor the monastery was heard of more. After this affair I remained at the castle but a year, at the end of which I was enabled to realize my old scheme of departure and independence.

“Mounted upon a powerful grey horse, whose speed and mettle I had often tried — fully equipped and armed for the road, and with some hundred crowns in my pocket — the remainder of my fortune, a small one enough, being lodged to my credit at Rome — I set forth from the old place which had been my home from my earliest days, to throw myself upon the chances of the world. It was not in nature that I should leave this place without keen regrets. Here all my life had been passed, and here were the only living persons who cared for or knew of my existence. As I rode slowly through the wild wood, which far away skirted the rising ground on which the castle stood, I turned to take a last look of the old building. The temper of our minds clothes even things inanimate with all accordant expression; and as I gazed upon its old grey front, it seemed to me that a familiar face looked sadly and reproachfully upon me. Every window and ivy-mantled battlement and buttress — all the picturesque irregularities — each nook and corner of the fine old pile, suggested to my busy memory some affectionate and pleasant remembrance, which moved my heart that we should thus part, and for a moment so softened me, that I was tempted to reject the long-cherished counsels of my pride, and return to the quiet haunts where I had been so happy. But my evil genius triumphed: the struggle was a short one, and I turned my back for ever on the castle, with a heart whose despondency, I might say desolation, gave too trite

presage of my after life. I put my horse to a rapid pace, and had soon left the scenes of my childhood far behind, and out of sight for ever.

"The evening fell before I had accomplished more than half the way which separated the castle from the village in whose *hostelrie* I proposed to pass the night. The road was broken and difficult of passage — in all respects, except as it served to indicate the direction of my route, rather an obstruction to my progress than tendency to facilitate it. The scenery through which I passed, grand and beautiful at all times, began now to assume that wild and fantastic character which the broad and spectral lights and shadows of a cloudless moon shed on all beneath it. The track which I had for some time followed with much difficulty, now led through a deep and rugged gorge, whose sides, precipitous and broken, were clothed with a dark luxuriant copse. For more than an hour I had neither seen human form nor habitation; but now, for the first time, I felt the depression of solitude. The utter desertion and silence of the place, unbroken except by the moaning of the night wind, filled my mind with that vague, mysterious dread which men attribute to superstition. My heart leaped within me as some broad gray rook, like a sheeted phantom in the hoar light of the moon, suddenly revealed itself; or again, when my excited fancy beheld, in the dark top of some tall fir nodding in the night breeze, a gigantic demon saluting me with "mop and moe," or beckoning me towards it with long fantastic arms. Full of such fancies, which scare us even when we laugh at them, I slowly and painfully pursued my solitary way, frequently scrambling through sloughs and fragments of timber, which storms had dislodged from among the overhanging rocks — often, too, obliged to dismount and lead my horse among chasms and difficulties where his instinct would scarcely have availed him. The labours and anxieties of my progress, were moreover enhanced by very considerable doubts as to the correctness of the path which I was pursuing — doubts which the difficulty, I might almost say the impracticability of the road, very nearly reduced to certainty. While thus struggling onward, my eye was caught by what appeared to be the figure of a horseman, moving cautiously round an abrupt and shadowy prominence, some four or five hundred yards in advance of me. As this figure slowly approached, I had ample opportunity of scanning his garb and equipments. He was mounted upon a tall, dark-coloured horse, and enveloped in a cloak. He wore, moreover, a broad-rimmed and high-crowned hat. Thus much I could plainly distinguish, as the form of the horseman moved between me and the moonlight. As the distance between us lessened, I cautiously laid my hand upon the butt or one of my holster pistols, resolved, if occasion should render it prudent, to deal very briefly with the cavalier in the cloak. When he had approached within about forty yards, or even less, he, perceiving me, it would appear, for the first time, suddenly reined in, and stood in the centre of my path, in strong and marked relief against the clear light of the moon, motionless and dark, as if horse and man were carved out of black marble. Although I never could accuse myself of much timidity in presence of a human antagonist, my situation was not by any means pleasant. That I stood in the presence and within almost certain range of one of those bandits, of whose quick and deadly aim many a marvellous tale was current, I had little doubt and yet my suspicions were not sufficiently confirmed to warrant me in anticipating his assault by any *overt* act of self-defence. It was clear that, if shots were to be exchanged, he must have the advantage of the first. With a keen and fixed gaze, therefore, I watched every movement of his, prepared, on the appearance of any gesture indicating an appeal to carbine or pistol, instantly to shoot him, if I could. The figure, however, made no such gesture, but, after a considerable pause, addressed me in a rough, goodhumoured voice —

"Signor, you travel late, and on a foul track. Santa Maria! you need a stout heart. Whitherward do you ride?"

"To Vallechchia, signor," replied I. "How far do you call it hence?"

"To Vallechchia!" repeated he of the cloak, after a most unceremonious burst of merriment: '*from* Vallechchia, I should say. Why, your back hath been turned upon the high road thither for ten miles at the least.'

"Holy devil!" muttered I, 'here is a pleasant adventure! I even suspected as much.'

"Nevertheless," continued the horseman, 'as you *have* left your track, you may as well leave it a little farther. You will find shelter and food, though both somewhat of the coarsest, about a league farther on, in the village; but if you turn back, it is most like you will have to put up with a supperless nap by the road side. Your nag must be well nigh on his last legs. What a devil of a blunder!'

"A devil of a blunder, indeed," echoed I. 'I see no better course than that you recommend. About a league ahead you say the village lies?'

"With these words I put my horse again to a walk, intending, before I reached my acquaintance — whom, in spite of his frank air and honest voice, I did not quite like — to stop under pretence of setting my saddle-girths to rights; in reality, in order to let him pass me without the necessity of turning my back upon him.

"By Saint Anthony, Signor," exclaimed he, as I slowly approached him, 'your horse has gone lame. This is worse again: see, he stumbles. By Bacchus, you must lead him and walk.'

"It was indeed too true. Some strain or damage received in scrambling through the broken inequalities and obstructions of the road had indeed rendered him perfectly lame.

"Holy apostle!" cried my sympathetic acquaintance, 'this is the very extremity of ill luck. Yes, you have, indeed, but one course before you now, and well if you can achieve it. You must on to the village. Old Beppo can afford you shelter for the night, as well as a fair bottle of wine, and in the morning, if not before, he will set your beast to rights. An honest companion is old Giuseppe, and a first-rate farrier to boot. Three miles hence you will find the old inn by the road side. But here again — here is another rub. *You* must follow the road we are upon, seeing you know no other; and thus, at once, we have the distance doubled; — whereas, if you could but make out your way by the bridle track — Stay, it must want nearly two good hours of midnight. I have more than half a mind to turn about and set you on the path. I'm time enough — time enough, sir, for my errand — a funeral; but I am too early by an hour or more. I can walk my horse ten miles in little more than three hours, and there I am before two o'clock. So never make words about it; I am your man: follow me. I'll lead you as far as the two chestnut trees, and thence I can point out the path to you — so that, unless misfortune is resolved to make a meal of you, you can't well meet another mishap for this night.'

"So saying, my new friend put his horse into a slow walk in the direction in which I was about to move. 'Of a truth,' thought I, 'a most accommodating gentleman! — somewhat suspicious, though; and yet why should he seem less trustworthy in my eyes than I in his? He may be, after all, a very honest, inoffensive sort of person. At all events, come what will, I cannot part company unless *he* choose it; after all, we stand but man to man — and the devil is in the dice if I cannot make good my own in a fair field.'

With these encouraging reflections, I followed my companion along the unequal road, under the broad shadowy boughs of the wild wood, which covered the sides of the glen. The path, after many windings, opened upon a wide level, surrounded by low hills, and covered unequally by patches of forest. As we pursued our way, my comrade chatted gaily, now and then interrupting his discourse with some fragment of an ancient ditty, and altogether with so frank and joyous an air, that my suspicions gradually disappeared, and instead of keeping cautiously in the rear, I took my place by his side. A handsome face, carrying an expression at once bold and honest, and lit up, as it seemed habitually, with a reckless, jolly good humour, further won upon my good opinion. I laughed and talked freely with him, and it was with real regret that at length I reached the spot where he was to leave me to explore the rest of my way alone.

“‘Here we are, Signor,’ said he, reining in his steed— ‘here we are at the two chestnuts, and here we part. Now mark my directions, for a mistake may cost you your supper. You see that gray rock on which the moon is shining. It stands just beside three or four old trees. Pass by that and turn to your right behind that dark screen of wood; ride through the open glade for about half a mile, and when you reach the open ground, ride right ahead, and a few hundred yards will see you upon the road again then take the left hand, and ten minutes will bring you to the inn, the first building you meet, a large house with some old fruit trees about it — and so signor, good night.’

“With these words my companion turned his horse’s head away, and at a slow trot began to retrace his steps. I watched him until his receding figure disappeared in the mists of night; and then, with a light heart, began to follow the course which he had indicated.

“By a close attention to the directions which I had received, I reached the road, and was proceeding leisurely upon it toward the object of my immediate search, when my ear was struck by the sound of a voice chanting a song, but so far away that I could distinguish nothing more than that the tones were those of a man. As I rode on, however, the sounds became more and more distinct, and at length I clearly descried the object from whence they issued. A little man was seated by the road side, upon a block of stone, or some other temporary resting-place, and, with folded arms and his legs extended before him, was chanting lustily, and with no very harmonious cadences, some rude amatory verses. Upon seeing me he forthwith suspended his vocal exercises, stood erect, walked two or three paces away from the road — stopped, turned round, and altogether appeared very much discomposed by the interruption which evidently unexpected arrival had caused. Having exchanged a courteous salutation, I had passed on some short distance, when the little man overtook me.

“‘Signor,’ said he, doffing his cap with a lowly reverence, as soon as he had reached my horse’s head, ‘will you pardon a great liberty?’

“‘Readily, I dare say,’ replied I. ‘Speak freely — can I serve you?’

“‘Most essentially, your excellency,’ replied he. ‘I am a poor man, a trader in small wares: they are here in my pack — the whole set are not worth a ducat; and I have not sold to the value of a baiocco. I am, indeed, sir, miserably poor — oh, miserably poor!’

“‘Do you want an alms?’ inquired I.

“‘No Signor,’ he replied; ‘no, I do not want alms, though I do not know how soon I may,’ he added hastily. ‘Heaven knows I am wretchedly poor!’

“‘What, then, would you have of me, in the name of patience?’ cried I. ‘Speak out, man.’

“‘Merely, sir,’ replied he, with an effort— ‘merely your company. I presume your course lies through some neighbouring town, where I might get my supper and rest. An onion and a piece of bread supplies the one, and an armful of straw the other. We poor men must live as we may.’

“‘You have rightly guessed,’ replied I. ‘I am on the way to a place of refreshment; and unless the guide with whom I have just parted has deceived me, we are now even within a mile of it. So walk with me, and welcome.’

“The poor man was profuse in his acknowledgments; and so, toward the village we went, side by side. As we proceeded, I could perceive pretty plainly that my Companion was by no means well at ease. Many and fearful glances he stole around, and not unfrequently I detected him in the act of glancing stealthily and suspiciously at myself. Whatever misgivings, however, he may have had respecting me, they were soon laid at rest, and he began to converse with me with less reserve, and in a tone bordering upon the confidential.

“‘Signor,’ said he, ‘I am rather a timid traveller, especially in the neighbourhood of these hills. The fact is, sir,’ continued he, lowering his voice to a whisper, ‘I was once robbed among them, about twenty years ago; stripped to my skin, and nothing left me but a pair of old trousers and, after all, I had a run of two miles or more to get out of the villains’ hands. I should have died of fatigue and exhaustion but for the charity of some good monks — the saints reward them!’

“The caution of the worthy pedlar was, then, to say the least of it, perfectly justifiable; yet I own that I frequently gratified my taste for the comical during the course of our brief journey, by practising upon the ever-wakeful fears of my companion — ample opportunity for which was afforded in the dim uncertain outline of the rocks and underwood with which the ground was unequally covered, and which, in many places, offered a rude resemblance to the outline of human figures grouped together. Thus chatting, we had ridden on for some time, when to my infinite satisfaction, and no less so to that of my companion, we came in sight of the object of our march.

“The road, at the point at which we had arrived, made a sudden sweep down an abrupt descent, which terminated in the bottom of a glen, intersected in its middle by a winding river, whose foam and eddies glittered like silver in the moonlight. Over this river the road was conducted by an old ivy-mantled bridge, at the far end of which stood the ruins of an ancient town. Some fine old trees cast their broad leaves over the road, and sheltered, in picturesque groups, a quaint and extensive building, which stood upon the near side of the river, having something of the mixed character of a house and a castle — in many parts very much decayed and dilapidated, and in some even ruinous. The deep-mouthed baying of a watchdog now arose from the solitary yard of the old place, enhancing, if any thing were required to do so, by its angry howlings, the desolate and melancholy character of the scene. This old building, then, was the inn to which my recent guide had directed me, and a comfortless one, judging by external appearances, it was likely to prove. Arrived at the door, we gave summary notice of our advent by repeated knockings administered with hearty good will, and accompanied by the most vociferous clamours upon honest Beppo. But

although these noises, by no means inconsiderable, were improved into a most energizing din by the furious yellings of the watchdog, we had long to wait before our summons produced any other effect than that of wearying ourselves. At length a window at some height in the building was opened, and a shrill cracked voice inquired, in no very courteous tones, what we wanted. After some parley, a window was closed again, and in a short time an old grey-headed little man, half habited, opened the door, and after a curious scrutiny, assisted by the light of a small lamp which he held in his hand, admitted myself and my companion into a kind of hall, whose shattered wainscoting and ruined appearance promise no very cheering reception. Before entering, I transferred my pistols from the holster pipes to my coat pocket, and throwing the reins upon my horse's neck, trusted to his exhausted condition to keep him from wandering far. At the same time I directed the old man, who was indeed Beppo himself, to have the beast cared for. This done, I followed mine host through several passages and chambers, at the end of which I found myself in a huge old-fashioned kitchen, on whose hearth blazed and crackled a cheerful fire of wood. Stretched upon the stone floor before it lay two boys, fast asleep, and by its side, in a chair, sat a girl, also soundly slumbering. At the harsh and well-known accents of old Beppo, the three sleepers started to their feet, and after some grumbings on their part, and not a few oaths and imprecations on his, they began to apply themselves in right earnest to make us comfortable.

"Speedily were we, myself and my humble companion, who at my invitation shared the repast, supplied with a cold pasty and a steaming omelet, and with right good will did we apply ourselves to these right savoury viands, seasoned, too, as I had been led to expect, with a bottle of excellent wine. When I had somewhat appeased the rage of hunger and thirst, I began leisurely to scan the apartment and its inmates. In the former I observed nothing worthy of remark, but to my no small surprise, among the latter I recognised, in the girl whom I had seen sleeping by the hearth on my entrance, a kitchen-wench, who having served in the Picardi castle for several years, had suddenly one night disappeared, without leaving any trace to suggest whitherward she had gone, or what had become of her. On seeing and recognising this poor creature thus unexpectedly, I was about to utter an exclamation of surprise when she checked me by a gesture of alarm and impatience, accompanied by a glance of peculiar significance towards the old innkeeper, who was now standing before the fire, with his back towards us. In compliance with the mute direction of the girl, I thereupon remained silent, having, by a repeated and more accurate inspection, satisfied myself of the identity of the person. There was something in the expression of face with which the girl had glanced at the old man, brief though that glance had been, which left upon my mind an indefinable and unpleasant impression; nor was this ambiguity of feeling towards my host at all favourably determined by the peculiarities of his outward man. He was, as I have said, a small man, his body, disproportioned to his limbs, was long, and curved, like that of a wasp; his shoulders were unusually narrow, and this defect was rendered more conspicuously striking by the enormous magnitude of his disproportioned head; his hair was grizzled and long, his eyebrows bushy, his eyes restless, and in expression very sinister, his nose flat and drooping, his mouth large and furnished with a perfect row of jagged fangs. A considerable projection of the under jaw, added to a face which expressed, in no ordinary degree, cunning and deceit, a character of sternness which, in moments of the smallest excitement, amounted almost to ferocity. Such features and such a cast of countenance were, in themselves, a cautionary notice; and though clothed in all the graces and smiles of what, from the moment that my dress, which was of rich material, caught the light, had become a studiously courteous welcome, could not banish or disguise what, in my mind, appeared the ineffaceable stamp of guilt. I know not how it was, however, though thus clearly appreciating the villainous character stamped upon the face of this man, no shadow of suspicion or thought of danger associated with him for a moment crossed my mind; on the contrary, I felt in unusual spirits, and altogether free from reserve. I laughed, I joked, I sang songs; I compelled the poor little pedlar to do the same, and whether it was that the snug fire and cosy kitchen had kindled the spirit of the vagrant merchant, or, as I more than half suspect, that the wine of which he had partaken contained some strange ingredient, certain it is that he met my gaiety with more than corresponding hilarity and confidence; he sang his best songs, and told a hundred stories of strange adventures, in which he himself had played the part of hero; he even went so far as to boast of his bargains, and dropped plentiful hints to the effect that he was by no means so poor a man as he might seem, and, in short, was to the full as indiscreet as I, if not more so.

"Suddenly, however, and almost in the midst of his boisterous jollity, the honest pedlar leaned back in his chair, and was almost instantly fast asleep. The innkeeper shrugged his misshapen shoulders, smiled, and shook his head, observing, at the same time, 'Poor devil! how tired he is — pity such a light heart should have so hard a trade. Would you, signor, desire to see your chamber!'

"I assented.

"'Martha,' continued he, turning to the girl, and pointing to the slumbering pedlar, 'let this honest man have such a resting-place as you can make out for him at so short notice. You may as well make it here — not in that corner, devil!' he suddenly exclaimed, fixing on the girl a tremendous look — 'not in that corner, you limb of hell!' and then, after a pause, he added, 'place it here, in the neighbourhood of the fire, snug and warm; the poor man must be made comfortable. These sluttish servants,' continued he, probably in the way of apology for his unaccountable burst of fury, 'are enough to make Job himself blaspheme.'

"So saying, and muttering all the way to himself, he led me through several passages to the foot of a clumsy and antique staircase of oak; this we ascended, and traversing the creaking and half rotten flooring of several rooms, whose bare and mildewed walls afforded but a dreary augury of what I was to expect, my host threw open a large door, with massive and dingy pillars of carved wood at either side, and with a low reverence informed me that this was my chamber. I entered, and found a spacious apartment hung with dusty and tattered tapestry, whose desolate appearance was much enhanced by the absence of all furniture, excepting a bed without curtains, whose four tall posts stood at their respective corners naked and comfortless as the shorn masts of a wreck; two or three old chairs and one small table completed the garniture of the room. Opposite to the foot of the bed, and at the same side with the door through which we had entered, was the hearth, exhibiting a huge and shadowy chasm, which might have stabled, at least, two horses comfortably. The cheerless aspect of this place, with all its dust, cobwebs, and nakedness about it, speedily subdued the frolicsome spirit which had kindled so madly within me in the snug old kitchen, by the roaring fire of crackling faggots. There was something hungry and treacherous in the dark and comfortless chamber, which accorded well with the sinister and forbidding aspect of my host — something which indistinctly boded danger, and whispered to the startled ear beware! My host placed the candle upon the table, and, with another profound reverence and a courteous benediction, took his departure.

"I was now alone. It is wonderful how intensely the outward securing of things, the mere forms and colour of what surrounds us, will move the temper of the mind. Had my host conducted me to a snug modern-looking chamber of moderate dimensions, with due allowance of tables, chairs, wardrobes, and curtains, and containing, above all, a cheery fire in the grate, I should probably have enjoyed the same cheerful good humour, sleeping or waking, throughout the night; but as it was, in so vast and im an old chamber, through whose damp vacancy a solitary candle shed a partial and uncertain light, if possible more depressing than darkness itself, far, as it seemed, from the inhabited part of the mansion, and separated by a long succession of passages, and chambers, and staircases, which I should have been puzzled to retrace, from all the human inhabitants of the house, I felt, I knew not how, a certain suspicion and uneasiness creep over me, which I could neither account for nor control; Without undressing, I threw myself upon the bed, leaving the candle burning upon the table beside me. I soon fell into an uneasy slumber, from which, however, I speedily started with that vague sensation of horror which sometimes overcomes the slumbering mind. I gazed fearfully round the room; it was empty as before. I sate up in the bed, and raised the candle above my head, so that its light might fall more distinctly on every object; but no, there was nothing to awaken my suspicions; all was silent, and just as I had left it. I lay down again, but could not sleep. I felt restless, anxious, and almost awestruck. A kind of vague, superstitious excitement came upon me; I could not rest; I could not remain still; I got up, and, taking the candle in my hand, resolved to satisfy myself that nothing was lurking in the obscure corners of the room. I seized my naked sword in one hand, and the candle in the other, and proceeded to search every nook and cranny of the chamber. I even went so far as to examine the huge chimney: in its dark chasm the faint light of the candle was lost at once, and I remember well thrusting, as high as my arm could reach with my rapier, but without any result except that two or three bats whirled down, and flitted around me in wide, uneven circles. Few who have ever indulged the kind of uneasiness which at that moment actuated me, can be ignorant that when once yielded to, it asserts the most capricious and unreasonable dominion over its victim, leading him, in his fantastic search, to places which, so far from affording verge enough to a human being, could scarcely accommodate a reasonably-proportioned guinea-pig. In the course of my exploratory rambles, I clambered upon the table to examine the windowsills, which were placed high in the wall, and deeply sunk, lest some assassin should lie coiled in their recesses; and although, as you may have easily anticipated, I found nothing of the kind, yet my scrutiny was rewarded by a discovery which did not tend to quiet my uneasiness. This was no other than a complete set of thick, and by no means antique iron stauncheons, strong and firmly sunk into the stone window-frame above and below. Each window exhibited the same sinister and gaol-like security. I confess I thought this precaution somewhat strange, nor were my suspicions diminished by observing that these bars were unlike all the other garniture of the room, sound and in good repair, in some places exhibiting, apparently with the freshness of yesterday, traces of the skill of the plumber and the smith. I turned now to the door, and opening it, looked out open the dark passage. There was nothing there but the chill night air, which floated cheerlessly into the chamber, causing my candle to flare and flicker like a torch. I closed it again, and having examined the priming of my pistols, and laid them along with my sword close beside me, I threw myself once more upon the bed. I scorned to admit even to myself that I feared any thing. I had an unbounded reliance upon my own activity and strength, and a sanguine confidence in my fortune. With my good weapons beside me I set all odds at naught, and though ever and anon something within me whispered— 'Leave this room and get thee down — the Philistines be upon thee — bestir thyself, lest they take thee sleeping' — yet such thoughts crossed my mind but fleetingly, and were despised.

"As I lay thus listlessly, the sweet slumbers of fatigue stole over me; the chamber in which I lay gradually became confused and indistinct; my fatigues and anxieties were alike forgotten in deep and calm unconsciousness.

"From this state of happy oblivion I was aroused by the pressure of a hand upon my shoulder, and the administration of two or three impatient jolts thoroughly awakened me. I started upright in the bed, and mechanically stretched my hand towards the pistols which lay beside me. The precaution was unnecessary; my visitor was a female — the poor girl whose person I had recognised in the kitchen before. The candle had hardly wasted since I had closed my eyes; I could not have slept a quarter of an hour. I gazed fixedly upon the features of the servant girl; they were tense and pale as those of death: there was such mortal agitation in the face as filled my mind with awe. With an impressive and imploring gesture, several times repeated, she enjoined silence, and then leaning forward, she whispered with slow and startling emphasis —

"Within a few minutes, *murderers* will come to your bedside: I wish you to escape. Draw the tapestry at this side of your bed; you will find a door behind it; a long passage leads from it to a flight of stairs, and they to the kitchen. Wait at the head of the stairs with your drawn sword in your hand, and when you hear me say, God send us all better days, it shall be a signal to you that one of them is about to enter from the kitchen the passage where you stand; drive the sword through him, and run into the kitchen, where you will find another, perhaps two; I shall take care that no more are there. Be firm, and pray to God.'

"With these words she glided speedily from the room, leaving me horror-struck at the sudden and ghastly intimation. With silent rapidity I rose from the bed — my preparations were speedily made. I stuck my pistols in my belt, and taking my naked sword under my arm, I soon found the door which my protectress had described. I extinguished the candle, and, entering the passage, closed the door behind me.

"This passage was extremely narrow and low; the floor and ceiling were of stone; and, as I imagined, its whole width lay in the thickness of the wall. Along this strange corridor I cautiously pushed my way; and, after a progress which appeared all but interminable, I reached the first of a flight of steep stone steps, leading downwards, and here I paused. I had hardly ceased to move when I became conscious that every sound, even that of the lightest foot-tread upon the kitchen floor, was distinctly audible where I stood. I heard the shuffling of many feet to and fro, accompanied by a great deal of whispering. These sounds continuing for a long time, without being followed by any decisive result, my nerves were gradually wrought by the suspense in which I stood to such a pitch of excitement, that I could not remain still. I descended the stairs with the utmost caution. When I had reached the foot, I found a space which afforded little more than standing room. Straight before me, and within a few inches of my face, was the door which opened upon the kitchen. This was a double door, constructed, as I afterwards found, so as to resemble from without a sort of cupboard. A broad chink in the centre, where the two valves met, admitted a bright stream of light; and placing my eye at the aperture, I witnessed, unobserved, a scene which no occurrence of my afterlife has availed to obliterate.

“At the side of the chamber opposite to that at which I was placed, stood the bed in which lay the poor pedlar: his deep stertorous breathing sufficiently attested the soundness of the slumber in which he was locked. A blazing faggot flamed and flickered on the hearth, throwing an intense but uncertain light over the whole scene. Close by the fire stood two stout fellows, in one of whom I recognised, without difficulty, my goodhumoured guide. Beside them sat a third, with his legs extended towards the cheering blaze, while with an air of sublime abstraction, he leisurely smoked a long pipe. At the same time I observed the girl to whom I owed the timely warning, whose success was yet so doubtful, employed in carrying towards the bed in which my poor comrade was sleeping, a large tub, or bucket. Beside the bed stood Giuseppe himself, a hideous incarnation of evil, glaring upon the unconscious slumberer. A boy, resting his head upon the foot of the bed, was fast asleep also. Such was the scene which my first glance through the aperture of the door revealed, under the fierce and restless light of the blazing wood fire. The baleful and ominous scowl which darkened the features of the ill-favoured innkeeper, and something like a foreboding of what was about to happen, rivetted my attention to the group about the humble bed where the poor little traveller lay. The innkeeper stooped forward, and with a sudden jerk of his hand threw the bedclothes down, so as to leave the upper part of the body of the sleeper bare, except for the coarse shirt which covered it. He next slid his arm gently under the shoulders of the unconscious man, and slowly drew his body towards the edge of the bed. At this moment the girl placed the bucket at the side of the pallet, and with an expression of strange horror turned towards the door where I stood, and passed on from my sight. Giuseppe now drew the shoulders completely over the edge of the couch, so that the head hung down towards the floor. The poor wretch continued to sleep. The innkeeper beckoned now to one of his companions, who stood at the fire. The man came over to the bed, and listlessly shoved the bucket with his foot, until he had brought it directly under the head of the sleeping man. I could endure no more. My resolution was taken. I set my shoulder against the door, and strained every muscle in my body in the desperate effort to burst it open. The effort, tremendous though it was, was made in vain. The door was fastened without, and that so effectively, that the assault with which I had just taxed its strength had hardly availed to make the fastenings creak. Well was it for me, however, that this sound, slight though it was, occurred while the villain was shoving the bucket, as I have just told you, with his foot along the floor. Had that little sound but reached the ear of any of the wretches who occupied the chamber, I must have perished. On such threads hang the lives of men! Weak and exhausted by the fruitless effort which I had made, I resigned myself in mute horror to witness the tragedy which I had no power to prevent. Giuseppe now, in a whisper which froze the life-blood at my heart, repeated the significant words— ‘Il coltello,’ *the knife*. His companion instantly turned to a cupboard, a few steps aside, and returned bearing in his hand the instrument, whose broad blade, as he walked along, he wiped in his jacket sleeve. The cold sweat burst from every pore in my body. I shook like a man in an ague: a deadly sickness came over me; yet I could not move my eyes from the objects, the sight of which filled me with this agony. The man, with the knife in his grasp, now placed himself by the bed, half sitting upon its edge. Giuseppe took the head of the sleeping man between his hands and supported it with the face turned directly towards the place where I stood. His companion now applied the edge of the knife to the skin of the throat, and moving it slightly along the surface, until it rested upon the spot which he judged most suitable to his purpose, he laid the palm of his left hand upon the back of the blade, and with his whole weight and strength forced it with a mangling gash, so far as almost to sever the head from the body. The crimson blood gushed, or rather spouted, from the chasm, and, with a gurgling sound, poured into the bucket. At the same moment the assassin, dropping the knife upon the floor, threw himself across the body, to control the convulsive strugglings of death. The pedlar had continued fast locked in sleep, until the knife had actually entered his throat. The moment, however, that the fatal stroke was given, the murdered man opened his eyes, and gazed with such an expression of imploring terror and agony, as fancy never beheld. At the same time he opened his mouth— perhaps to shriek— perhaps to pray; but sound was never more to come from thence. Blood bubbled forth, and streamed over his white and quivering face. Again and again he opened his mouth with ghastly strugglings. Nor did this fearful motion cease, until the eye fixed, and the mortal agony ended in death. The innkeeper then wrung the head round, while his companion, with the same knife, ploughed through the tendons and muscles, until they succeeded in actually cutting the head from the trunk. The body lay upon the bed, and the neck still hung bleeding over the tub, into which Giuseppe dropped the head. I could see no more. My brain grew dizzy. A sick faintness came upon me. I clambered, I know not how, up the stairs, and, sitting down upon the uppermost step, I clasped my damp forehead in my hands, and remained for some minutes almost unconscious of every thing, absorbed in one dull, vague feeling of horror.

“As soon as I came a little to myself, I plainly perceived, by what I could gather from the whisperings which I overheard from below, that the murderers were engaged in removing the body of their victim. Steps now slowly and unsteadily traversed the kitchen— I suppose those of him who carried the horrible burden. The outer door was cautiously opened; the steps passed forth, and the door closed again.

“‘The gentleman sleeps like a top,’ whispered a gruff voice. ‘He has just put out his candle, and lies still as a dormouse.’

“‘Take your stiletto,’ replied another. ‘Morning will break before you have finished.’

“‘Remove your boots, bungler,’ cried a female voice. ‘Your spurs make jingle enough to ring the dead from their graves.’

“‘Peace, gaol-bird,’ cried Giuseppe. ‘What’s that to thee?’

“‘Well, well,’ exclaimed the girl, with a slow distinct utterance, ‘God grant us all better days.’

“I needed not the warning, I had already placed myself in readiness. After a short delay the door, through which I had just witnessed the scene which I have attempted to describe, opened wide. A broad light flashed upon the rugged and narrow stairs, and a tall figure began to ascend. I stood in the deep shadow awaiting his advance; and as soon as he had arrived within two or three steps of the top, I sprang forward, and lunged full at his breast. This was not done so quickly that he did not catch a glimpse of me, as I started forward, in sufficient time to enable him with his arm perfectly to parry the thrust. As it happened, however, this was all the worse for himself; for instead of turning the sword aside, he merely struck the point upwards, and it entered somewhere near the eye, and, penetrating the brain, killed him on the spot. Without a groan he tumbled headlong over the steps. Springing over his prostrate body, I rushed into the kitchen. Giuseppe and my honest guide were the only males within it. The latter stood nearest to me, and his astonishment at my entrance was such that he did not move. With a deliberate aim of two seconds, I levelled my pistol at his breast and fired, he fell— I know not whether mortally hurt or not, but I never saw him move again. Without the loss of an instant I levelled the second pistol at the innkeeper— but it missed fire— the wretch ran directly to

the door, but before his hand had reached the latch I was up with him. With a hideous yell of defiance he sprang round and grappled with me. His strength far exceeded what his figure seemed to promise; but I felt that he was still no match for me. In a moment I hurled him back upon the gory pallet, and planted my knee upon his breast. As we struggled, he caught my left thumb within his teeth, and clenched them upon it until they fairly ground upon the bone. Heedless of the pain, I clutched his throat in my right hand, and pressed with all my might and strength — in vain he struggled — the eyes started — the face blackened. Froth covered my hands, and before two minutes he lay insensible.

“For God’s sake, girl,” cried I, “give me the pistol.” Silently she obeyed me, and for a moment relaxing my grasp, I seized the weapon by the muzzle, and dashed the heavy butt into his skull — he was dead. Yet such was the strength with which his teeth were locked upon my thumb, that I could not release it until I had beaten out nearly half his teeth, I forced the barrel of the pistol into his mouth, and employing it as a lever, I, with much exertion, unlocked the clenched teeth, and loosed the mangled joint. At this moment I heard a heavy step without, the latch was raised, and one of the fellows who had been present at the murder of the pedlar entered. I did not give him time to recover his surprise, but placing the pistol to his head, I said in a stern and determined voice— ‘Villain! lead me to a horse. If I am discovered or interrupted, I will blow your brains out.’

“Good Signor,” said the fellow, evidently ill at his ease, ‘patience for heaven’s sake — be not rash.’

“I give you five seconds,” replied I, ‘to bring me to a horse: at the end of that time, the condition unfulfilled, I will shoot you through the head, as sure as God is in heaven. Look at those corpses — you see I am in earnest.’

“The fellow said not one word more; but, being himself unarmed, led me quietly from the door of the inn at which we stood to that of the stable. I all the time holding him by the back of the collar, with the pistol close by his head.

“Choose a strong one, scoundrel,” said I, as we entered the stable, in which stood several horses ready saddled. I compelled him to lead out the steed, and to mount first himself, and springing up behind him, I commanded him to ride on the shortest track leading to the high road to Rome. The moon had gone down, and the night was now so dark that I could not see many yards before me. In obedience to my directions the fellow rode at a hard trot. We had scarcely crossed the bridge, when two figures loomed suddenly in sight, and so directly in advance of us that it required a sudden and violent exertion of the bit which threw the animal back upon his haunches, to prevent our running foul of this nocturnal patrol.

“Who rides so hard?” inquired one in no very cultured accents. Here I pressed the muzzle of the pistol against my companion’s head, as a salutary hint.

“Who should it be,” exclaimed my comrade, ‘but a friend — do not you know me?’

“Faith, brother,” replied the same harsh voice, ‘it is well we did not rob thee, and thou us;’ and marvellously tickled with this pleasant conceit he laughed long and lustily. ‘Any news?’ added he— ‘any rabbits in the burrow? any nightingales in the cage — eh?’

“Ay, two,” replied my companion, ‘with their necks wrung. You will see more at the inn. Good night.’

“We were passing on, when again one of them exclaimed —

“Hey! what the devil have you gotten behind you?”

“Again, I let my honest companion feel that the weapon rested upon his skull; and with much *nonchalance*, he replied —

“What is behind me? why a bag of bloody carrion, if you must have it — but we bandy words too long — when I get rid of this, I’ll find you at old Beppo’s.”

“Well, good luck, most holy sexton,” replied the horseman; ‘and as for your burthen, *requiescat in pace — amen.*’

“So saying, the two horsemen rode on, and we pursued our way, at the same hard pace until the morning’s light began to streak the east.

“Watching my opportunity as we rode rapidly down a steep declivity, I bestowed my companion a vigorous shove, which sent him clean over the horse’s head; and before he had well done rolling I had left him four hundred yards behind me. With a courteous valediction I rode on, and without another adventure reached the glorious city of Rome, where strange things befel me, as I shall tell you. But first give me a cup of wine.”

PART TWO

"In the heart of a gay capital, possessed of finds which, to my shortsighted inexperience, seemed all but inexhaustible, full of ardour, curiosity, and passion, I threw myself heart and soul into the intoxication and excitement of all the folly, vice and extravagance which revolved around me; with more of inquisitiveness than of depravity, I hunted out vice in all secure and secret haunts, where, undisguised, and maddening, and terrible, it ruled and rioted. The adventures and perils of the wild scenes in which I mixed, had for me a strange attraction; I panted to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; I longed to try and prove those old and mighty rulers of the human kind — the ancient vices of the world in the high places of their power; recklessly I courted danger: wildly I plunged into the unfathomable gulf of sin, and madly did time fly by.

"My acquaintances were among the madcap young nobles of the city. There was nothing to withdraw me from the headlong career of sins and follies in which I was borne, except prudence or religion — and I had neither. I resolutely closed my eyes against all distant consequences; I saw but the present — I would see no more. I felt that when my wealth was squandered, I would find a way to get more; I cared not how, provided it were boldly, and in the manner of a soldier of fortune. Even then my coming destiny filled the vision of my mind; I beheld it perhaps with awe, but undismayed; for me it had a dreadful fascination — I rushed towards it with a bosom full of defiance and scornful recklessness.

"Fagged and jaded with the last night's debauch, I rose towards evening from the numb and heavy sleep of excess; and wandered forth to breathe the fresh air upon the Corso. It was the Carnival — the streets were thronged with masks, jugglers, itinerant gamesters with their various apparatus for cheating the incautious; mountebanks and empirics holding forth upon their crazy stages; noble ladies in rich attire walking with their highborn protectors, and shouldered and jostled by countrymen and beggars — all mingled up in the fantastic mazes of a bewildering and gorgeous dream. Captivated by the never-ending variety of the scene before me; hour after hour flew by; and when at length the sun went down, and twilight was succeeded by the wan splendour of the moon, I still was sauntering among the gay and idle throng, whose groups crossed and flitted before my eyes in such rich and grotesque contrariety. 'Why so sad, young gentleman?' exclaimed a voice close by my ear, while, at the same time, a party-coloured sword of lath was laid smartly upon my shoulder. The speaker was a harlequin, who had turned for a moment from his masked companions to accost me. 'Has thy ladylove frowned, or thy Jew friend been cruel? has thy luck been hard and thine head soft? are thy creditors more than thy credit? art thou hungry, or thy sweetheart angry? has she broke her faith, and thou not thy fast? if so, sour looks will never mend the matter — lament tomorrow, but laugh tonight. The gods have given but one excuse for glum looks during carnival, and that is the choleric. If thou hast it, thou art right to be religious; but get thee home and pray in bed: thy public piety is a public nuisance. Owlet, avaunt!' A loud smack from his lath weapon enforced the mandate, and under cover of the horse laugh with which the crowd greeted the conclusion of his lecture, the mask unperceived whispered sharply in my ear as he passed— 'Keep your eye on me, friend, and follow me; your doing so may save your life. Enough.' With these strange words he plunged once more into the crowd, and mingled as before in the madcap gaieties of the scene. My curiosity was however excited. I followed him carefully, and thought I could observe him occasionally abstract his attention for a moment from the tricks and raileries with which he abundantly entertained the multitude, to steal a glance toward me, and ascertain that I was present. Gradually the harlequin withdrew himself from the group with which he had borne his part, and by little and little separated himself from the crowd, I still following at a short distance. With many a fantastic pirouette and gambol away he flitted through by-lanes and alleys. Again and again was I obliged to run at the top of my speed to keep my strange conductor in view, watching the tall light form with a vigilance so close and exclusive that I knew not through what streets I passed, and scarcely in what direction I was moving. We passed through the scattered houses of the suburbs; and although I strained my sinews to the utmost, my guide gained upon me so fast that I began to grow fearful of losing him altogether. He was now running lightly by the banks of the Tiber — we passed the thronged dwellings of the city; and the cool air from the quiet country came rushing along the waters, the grateful and refreshing gift of nature. Half-vexed at the pertinacious speed with which my companion pursued his course, and half-suspecting the whole affair to be a hoax, I was just about to stop and turn about, when my intention was anticipated by the mask. He suddenly checked his course, sprang into the air, and, with a grotesque flourish of his sword, turned to the right about, awaiting with a low mock reverence my breathless pursuit. I was soon by his side. 'Now in the devil's name, sir harlequin,' exclaimed I, 'for what have you given me this unconscionable race? — your tidings must needs be worth the hearing when a man must run after them as if Beelzebub ran at his heels.' 'Fie, fie,' cried the mask, 'devil and Beelzebub are ugly words, and especially now and here. Be, I pray you, a little more pious: you know not what may be near you.' At these words my companion stooped down and lowered his head to a level with the reeds which grew by the river's brink, in the attitude of one who listens attentively for some distant sound — then raising himself, he added in a lower tone, 'We must go further; follow me yet a few steps more.' Accordingly he led the way along the river bank, but now at a slow pace. As he went along he began to sing a strange and mournful air, the like of which I never heard before or since, and *that* with a management of voice, if possible, stranger still. It appeared to me like the most extraordinary ventriloquism; for the sounds seemed sometimes to come from one side — sometimes from another — sometimes high in air — sometimes so far away as almost to be lost in the distance, and again swelling into a fierce and thrilling loudness, as if the voice was rushing toward us with the speed of a whirlwind. I cannot describe to you the strange effect of this music upon me: I felt ready either to laugh or cry — I felt a weight at my heart and an excitement in my head more than hysterical. The words which he sang were odd, and to me unintelligible; but he threw into them a laboured significance which added to the unpleasantness of the whole. The words have remained fixed in my mind, and to this day I cannot utter them without sensations which perhaps you would laugh at. They ran as follows: —

"Child of wrath, with the human bride, Mighty oppressor of earthly kind, Thy presence walks with us, side by side, I feel thee, and know thy soft laugh on the wind.

Kiss, kiss his hot lips again and again:

He has given thee his heart; now master his brain.

"The excitement under which I laboured increased until it amounted to a degree of horror almost unendurable. Under the vague impulse of superstitious terror, I was about to turn and run from my companion, when he, suddenly looking round, exhibited to my astounded sense the features of the hoary monk or demon, Father Anthony. Nerved by the extremity of terror, I turned my back upon the abhorred shape, and fled with the speed of light toward the city. The attempt to escape was utterly in vain. Though I ran with a speed which nothing but the agony of terror could have sustained, the fiendish monk not only kept up with me, but ran round and round me — sometimes in narrower, sometimes in wider circles, with gambols of preterhuman agility, and grimaces more hideous than nightmare ever saw. Suddenly he stopped short before me, and by an unearthly sympathy I was constrained to do the same: he sat down upon the earth; by an irresistible impulse I did so likewise. We were opposite to one another — face to face, and scarcely a yard asunder. He tossed his arms wildly in the air — I could not choose but do the same: he writhed his features into contortions such as delirium never portrayed, each one of which, with frenzied exaggeration, I felt forced to imitate. Into these hideous grimaces he threw, at times, expressions of demoniac passion so fearfully intense, that hell itself could not have exceeded them: these too, I was forced to follow, and the dreadful passions themselves possessed me in succession, while all the time, independently of these malignant inspirations, there remained within me, as it were looking on, a terrified self-consciousness. He yelled forth blasphemies the most awful, while my very brain sickened with horror — the unearthly power constrained me to echo them all, tone for tone, and word for word. He advanced his face, I did the same — our features almost touched. He burst into a peal of laughter like that of lunacy, I joined howling in the horrible mirth. Every word he spoke, I spoke — every movement he made, I made too. My motions all corresponded with his, with the simultaneousness and accuracy with which shadow follows substance; I felt as if my identity was merging into his. He placed his hand within his bosom — my hand copied the gesture, and rested upon my stiletto; he drew a dagger from his breast — I drew my poignard from mine. At the next instant his weapon was at his throat, and mine at mine. Another moment, and hell would have had its victim; but it was to be otherwise. A voice close by shouted, 'In the name of God, young man, forbear,' and at the instant I was disenthralled; the hideous figure cast upon me one livid scowl, and threw himself on the ground. I saw no more, for my senses forsook me. How long the demon had made me the sport of his hellish mockeries I cannot say. As soon as consciousness returned I found myself supported in the arms of an honest peasant — he to whose intervention I owed my life.

"So, so, master," exclaimed he, 'a pleasant frolic this, for the carnival — time was, when you youngsters were satisfied with carving your neighbours' throats, but nothing will serve you now, forsooth, but cutting your own. In God's name, young man, why do you seek to harm yourself?'

"Tell me," said I eagerly, 'where he is gone — where is the mask — the harlequin — the devil? Bring me away from this place. Where is the monster you saw before me?'

"Sir," replied the man, 'I see you are disordered. I will go with you to the town; here, take my arm.'

"Where," I said with increased excitement, 'where is the hellish thing that sate on the ground before me?'

"Pshaw, sir," replied he, 'there was nothing before you but yonder old bush; to be sure,' he added, after a thoughtful pause, 'it did sway and tremble rather oddly; and then, when I came up, I saw something like an otter sliding softly through the sedges into the stream. But that is all — come on, signor, let us be moving.'

"Silently I walked with my friendly guide, who cast many a fearful look around, and muttered many a prayer as we proceeded — so contagious is mysterious terror.

"For more than a month I was in mind and body utterly prostrate. There is in youth, however, a recuperative power, an elasticity which never loses its spring while youth remains. In five weeks' time, after an illness, during which mind and body were bound down in the fiery chains of fever for nearly the space of a month, I was once more mingling in all the pleasures and follies of the capital, as if no fears or perils had ever crossed me. As time wore on, I began to grow weary of uncontrolled indulgence. Fashion is a hard task-master — vice and pleasure tire their pursuers at length more than the severest toil — monotony dulls the edge of enjoyment, and the solicitous repinings of conscience wear the spirits, and irritate and embitter the temper; all this I felt, and half (but *only* half) resolved to reform, and lead a better life. In this melancholy mood I was wandering through the oldest and least-frequented streets of the city, when a singular adventure befel me. There was walking before me, with slow and feeble steps, an old and venerable man; his dress was of the richest velvet of that hue which we call *ruby*, lined with yellow satin, and richly overlaid with gold lace; the fashion, however, of his garments was that of another day, and though the suit was no doubt originally a splendid one, it bore no less in its faded colour and tarnished embroidery, than in its obsolete construction, the evidences of extreme antiquity. From under the shadow of a broadleafed hat his snow-white hair descended in venerable ringlets, covering the topmost folds of his short velvet cloak. In his hand he carried a crutch-handled stick of ebony, which, with measured and solemn action, he impressed upon the pavement as he proceeded. The figure of the old man was slight, and as well as I could discern, elegantly moulded; he bore about him, too, that indescribable air of high birth and breeding which cannot be mistaken. These circumstances, along with the striking peculiarities of which I have already spoken, irresistibly fixed my attention and engaged my curiosity. As I followed in the track of this old man, he suddenly tottered, as if through weakness or giddiness, and would, no doubt, have fallen upon the pavement, had not I instantly caught him in my arms and supported him. He speedily recovered, and with many courteous professions of gratitude, acknowledged my services. These professions were as courteously received as made, and I offered the aged man the support of my arm, during the remainder of his walk. The tender of my support was accepted with eager gratitude, and arm in arm, at a leisurely pace, we walked down the street together. The old man, as I have said, was soon quite recovered; and as we moved slowly along, he conversed with that easy and courtly gaiety by which age can so pleasingly and irresistibly engage and fascinate the young. Almost without knowing how, so pleasantly had my companion beguiled the way, I found myself at the entrance of a venerable mansion, before which my old acquaintance made a halt. I looked around me, for so completely had my attention been absorbed in the gay conversation of my comrade, that I had scarcely observed the objects through which we were passing. The street was dark and narrow — the houses on either side tall, sombre, and antique, and withal carrying upon them a character of decay and neglect which added gloom and sadness to a scene already sufficiently uncheery. The street had made a curving sweep, so that at the point we stood I could see but little way either up or down. As far as I could see, however, it was absolutely empty: there was neither sound of human voice, nor echo of footfalls, but a silence like that of desolation. We stood directly in front of a richly carved and massive stone doorway, the portal

of a huge timeworn edifice — a palace, but so weather-stained neglected, and crumbling, that the evidences of its original architectural splendour served only to render its present aspect more solemn and more sad. Reading, perhaps, in my face what was passing in my mind, the old man, with a melancholy musing smile, accosted me —

“It is, indeed, a mournful place — little better, perhaps, than a ruin; the street, too, as you observe, well accords with the character of this deserted shrine of hospitality — the spirit of desolation dwells in and about it — the current of human life frets and chafes near and far, but no chance eddy thereof ever finds its way into this dim, silent channel. The roar of human occupation, toil, and jollity, is here swallowed in perennial silence — we never hear it — in almost every house this street contains, you see the monument of some noble family gone to ruin, wasted by prodigality, or struck down into the dust by the heavy arm of power. Those who dwell here seldom seek to look into the staring, noisy world; they think not of the present, but ever upon the past — and oh! how variously Silence here holds her eternal court — see, lest any careless footstep should break the quiet of the place, gentle dame Nature has spread her soft green mantle over the uneven pavement — the long grass waves in the wind here as in a churchyard: yet, amid all this lonely silence, is there any quiet for heart or brain? Oh, eternal, unforgiving spirit! is there any rest — is there any unconsciousness?”

“He clasped his hands together — his head sank upon his breast, and I saw the tears fall, one by one, fast upon his bosom.

More shocked than I can describe at what I heard and saw, I stood silently by, scarcely knowing what course to take. I soon, however, grew weary of my foolish situation, and, beginning to regard the whole thing as rather comic than imposing, I asked, somewhat abruptly, whether I could do any thing further for him, at the same time observing that the evening would soon close, and that I had better find my way home while I had light. This speech soon brought the old gentleman to his senses. With many apologies he pleaded to be excused.

“‘Signor,’ he continued, ‘did you but knew half what I have endured, far less what I *must still* endure, you would pardon this else unpardonable vehemence. I will not, however, weary you with, after all, what is but too common a tale of life. Those who have seen as much of life as I have, are seldom happy. I can, however, as you perhaps have perceived, sometimes forget my griefs; and if you will vouch your forgiveness, by entering so poor and unpromising a dwelling as that before you, you will make me more your debtor, sir, than I am.’

“There was a gentleness and even a kindness in the tone and manner in which the old man addressed me which easily prevailed. I at once consented.

“From his pocket he drew a key, to which the street-door instantly yielded. Closing the hall door, which was of massive oak, he led the way through a stone vaulted passage, and through another door into a spacious and lofty hall, also vaulted, and built of stone; this latter door he also swung to with a heavy crash, which echoed through the empty chamber with many a dreary reverberation. The room in which we now stood was hung round with splendid full-length pictures. It seemed to be a gallery of ancestral portraits. They were superbly painted — evidently from the hands of the most celebrated of our Italian masters: the collection was worth a monarch’s ransom.

“‘You will find occupation for a few minutes in looking at these old family pictures,’ said my host; ‘and you will, I hope, pardon me if I leave you to entertain yourself for a brief space.’ So saying, the old man made a deep reverence, and before I had time to reply, he darted through a door at the far extremity of the apartment, and disappeared.

“The pictures were very well worth an attentive examination, and afforded me no small pleasure. But there were three placed side by side, over each of which hung from top to bottom a black velvet pall, and although not without some reluctance upon the score of good breeding, to these my curiosity led me by an irresistible attraction. I took my stand upon a stool which stood beneath these against the wall, and raising the covering of the first, I beheld a faithful and very beautifully painted portrait of my entertainer, arrayed precisely as I had seen him. The painting looked old, and yet it represented him not as any younger than he now was. While musing upon this discrepancy, my eye accidentally fell upon some numerals dimly traced in the corner of the canvass. Heavens! the date they recorded was that of more than a century before: yet the portrait was undoubtedly his. It was a perfect likeness — character, expression, every thing — it was a facsimile of the original. My convictions, too, were yet further established by observing traces upon the back of the right hand, which rested upon a crutch-handle stick, a deep scar, which had caught my attention in the original, as his hand lay within my arm in our to-day’s walk. Again I examined the date, I had read it aright — the year it recorded had been passed nearly a century and a half before, and the mellow tone of the picture itself tallied well with its silent but startling claim to antiquity. With a strange feeling of interest and of horror I suffered the sable drapery to fall again over the picture; and raising the covering of the next, I beheld the portrait of a young lady, richly dressed, and of such surpassing loveliness and grace as my eyes had never seen before. Entranced lost in wonder and rapture, I gazed upon this beautiful vision; a creature so perfect, of such unutterable, such infinite loveliness and grace had never even dimly visited me in my most ethereal fancies. Like one lost in a sad and beautiful dream, I stood rapt and moveless, my heart wrung with vain yearnings, for still the thought stole over me that all this most terrible beauty before whose image I stood in this intense worship of every faculty, had long ago passed to dust and darkness. Thus gazing and dreaming on, the tears flowed silently down my cheeks. Strange fascination!

“‘You make yourself at home, signor, I’m glad to see,’ said the old man, who unperceived by me was standing by my shoulder.

I started, and dropped the velvet curtain, and was for some time so confounded as not to be able to articulate a single word. There stood the old man, his figure disposed in precisely the attitude represented in the portrait, his tall crutch-handled stick in his right hand, and his left buried to the wrist in the bosom of his doublet; there he stood in all points — face, attitude, and garb the breathing incarnation of the picture on which I had just been looking.

“‘You examine them, these portraits?’ inquired the old man.

“‘Two of them, signor,’ I replied with some embarrassment.

“‘This one,’ continued he, raising the pall which covered the first, ‘is accounted extremely like me; it is the portrait of one of my house, a brave man, who fell one hundred and forty years since in the service of the state of Venice. I am reckoned like him, strangers at least account me so.’

"He fixed his eyes upon me, I thought with that uncertain, curious gaze with which those who feel themselves the objects of suspicion, encounter a glance of scrutiny. I averted my eyes, and he, suffering the velvet cloth to drop into its place, turned upon his heel and walked twice or thrice rapidly through the hall; he stopped beside me, and laying his hand kindly upon my shoulder, he said —

"Come, come, you must not grow melancholy, my young friend; you were looking, when I surprised you, at a portrait of singular beauty, that of a young woman. You shall probably have an opportunity before long of comparing the counterfeit with the original. Will that not bring a smile to your cheek? time was when such a promise would have led me blindfold any where; but I am partial, perhaps, she is my daughter."

"If the old man looked for compliments upon the beauty of his child, I believe he must have been satisfied, if my words bore any proportion to my feelings. Man never spoke language of more passionate admiration than did I, he smiled and cried 'Bravo,' as I finished; then observing that it was growing dark, he placed his arm within mine, and led me from the hall.

"We passed through several apartments, lofty, damp, and dark, impressed with the character of desertion and decay, but every where carrying the evidences of former splendour.

We entered a chamber hung with dusky tapestry. The end at which we stood on entering was occupied by a table and some antique chairs, and upon the floor, corresponding with the angles of the table, but at the distance of some six feet, were placed four massive golden candlesticks containing huge wax tapers, which shot into the air to the height of twelve feet, and burned with a flame larger than that of a torch, but white and clear as the light of the sun. The strange effect of these arrangements was much enhanced by another still more extraordinary peculiarity which marked this chamber as unlike any which I had ever seen before. The end of the room at which we stood, as I have already said, was occupied by the table and the other furniture which I have mentioned, but the opposite extremity of the chamber I could not see. It was effectually shrouded from my sight by a light semi-transparent vapour, which rolled and eddied in cloudy volumes within some twenty or thirty feet of the table — beyond this distance it did not come — some invisible influence held it back, and there it hung, forming a strange, heaving barrier, a mysterious impenetrable veil between human vision and sights, perhaps, unsuited to its ken. These odd peculiarities of the room in which I found myself were not without their effect upon my imagination and spirits — a sense of unknown danger overshadowed me. I recounted in my own mind the circumstances of my meeting with my host; every thing which had happened since appeared to me to furnish matter of indefinite and horrible suspicion; yet when I looked upon the mild features of the venerable old man, and read in the play of his cheerful eye the returning animation of that gay spirit which had so won upon me at first, I felt my doubts rebuked, and my superstitious fears absolutely ridiculous. Still, however, a gloom was upon me, and it required a perpetual effort to prevent the unpleasant impressions which I could not dispel from deepening into awe and terror.

"The old man motioned to me to sit down in one of the great antique chairs by the table, which was covered with golden plates, and dishes, and cups. You will readily believe me when I tell you that I had no desire to eat. I took advantage then of my host's abstemiousness to avoid partaking of his viands, and this was the first and the last supper at which I ever sat where not one dish was invaded or even uncovered.

"Well," said my entertainer, "as you will not eat, you needs must drink: if you will imitate my vices, copy at least my solitary virtue." So saying he drew towards himself one of the cups which stood upon the table, and shoved another to me. "Old men have a right to be selfish," said he, "and, therefore, wishing myself many repetitions of this evening, and that out of this casual rencounter may arise a lasting union between us, young man, with all my soul I pledge you." Long and deep was the draught with which the old man drained to its last the golden goblet; as he raised the cup to his lips I raised mine to do him honour, and as I did so I thought I heard some one mutter over my shoulder — "That is not wine."

"I glanced round but there was no one from whom the sounds could have proceeded. I raised the cup once more, the crimson liquid foamed up towards my lips, a slight sensation of giddy sickness passed over me as I lifted the vessel, and the same voice, real or imagined, whispered sharply in my ear the startling words — "But the *blood*, which is the life of it, thou shalt not eat." Horrified I dropped the cup upon the floor, and whatever was the liquor which it contained, it was every drop shed upon the ground. The old man when this happened was still engaged in his deep potation, and did not perceive the accident, or if he did, he certainly did not pretend to do so. He wiped his mouth and rose from the table; he motioned me to be still, and kneeling upon the ground with his face toward the hidden part of the chamber, he continued apparently in long and earnest devotion, stretching his hands forth with many gestures of vehement entreaty. As he did so, the surface of the cloudy barrier became agitated, strange lights and shadows flitted over it; sometimes tracing in the eddying vapours wild ghastly features, which vanished almost as soon as they appeared, and sometimes dimly showing monstrous shapes, and now and then more faintly-traced forms of surpassing grace — all gliding and wheeling, appearing and melting away, separating and mingling like the endless shiftings of a wondrous dream. At length there came a low and marvellously sweet sound of far-off music, like holy choirs singing a wild requiem over the dead; the sound stole floating along, sometimes broken and disordered, as though the untutored wind swept at random through the chords of a thousand-stringed instrument, then again, coming with perfect harmony and unspeakable melody over the senses, until once more the music would lose itself in the wild burst of the wailing wind. Still, however, minute after minute these fitful wanderings of the melody grew less and less, and the music breathed on, louder and more clear, in sweet but unearthly order. As these wondrous sounds rose on the ear, I beheld in the cloudy curtain, at first so dimly traced that my eye lost it every moment, but gradually becoming more fixed and discernible, the shadowy semblance of a female form, wrapt in a thin mantle, and as it seemed of beauty more than human. This form, at first traced only in the faintest discernible shadow, grew gradually more and more clearly defined, until at length the outline became fixed, and the colours, and lights, and shadows, after some uncertain flittings to and fro, clearly developed themselves, and thus little by little, without my being able to remember at which point the transition had taken place, I beheld what had first been no more than the lightest shadow upon a fleeting vapour now stand before me in corporeal substance — a model of preternatural loveliness in limb and feature, but pale and bloodless as the dead. The old man arose, and stepping sadly and reverently to her, he took the small hand which hung languidly by her side, and led her slowly towards the table. The beautiful form moved lightly over the floor, but seemingly without more volition or purpose of its own than belongs to a mere automaton; the lips pale as marble, the eyes fixed and glittering, and every muscle of the perfect face still as death. He led her to a chair, and placing her in it, he took one of the large golden goblets, like that which he himself

had just emptied, full of the dark red liquid, and putting its brim to her lips he poured every drop of its contents down her throat; he laid the vessel again in its place, and withdrawing to a little distance, he folded his arms, bowed his head downwards like one in deep dejection, and silently awaited the result. After two or three wild thrilling peals, the music gave place to utter silence, and at the same moment the glow of life spread itself gently over the face and limbs of the girl, and dyed her lips with the brightest crimson, the fixed glance gave place to the soft fire of animation, and I beheld before me the breathing archetype of the portrait whose beauty had so enchanted me. I approached her — I spoke with her, her voice was melody such as fills the ear with ever-varying sweetness, and floods the heart with mysterious joy; an embodied dream of divine beauty — unspeakable grace in every the slightest movement, and absolute fascination in every look; the very mystery of her being but heightened the wild interest which wrapt every faculty of my soul: delighted wonder, love and awe, fear and rapture, filled all my heart with a sweet and terrible delirium of worship. I saw revealed before me a divinity, clothed in the eternal majesty of ideal beauty — that glorious mystery after which the heart of man has panted and toiled, and yearned, even since the world was young. I know not how the time went by, many hours seemed but as the dream of a minute; the spell was broken by the old man her father, who taking me by the hand led me away through the dark part of the chamber; the chill and darkness of the cold cloudy medium through which we walked fell like death upon my heart — a revulsion of horror unutterable succeeded; sickness of heart and terror were upon me. The fearful transition was, however, of short duration; an unseen arm thrust me forward, and when I recovered my equilibrium I found myself in the aisle of a church, crowded with listeners, and lighted with many lamps. A preacher, too, was loudly haranguing them from the pulpit. How I had entered the place I knew not; I stood in the centre of the church; my movements, however, had undoubtedly been somewhat abrupt.

“‘Sir,’ exclaimed a bull-necked, redfaced burgher, with an indignant scowl, ‘if you must make a row, you had better do it at the other side of the door. We came here to listen, not to be kicked and jostled.’”

“‘What the devil ails the young gentleman?’ cried another; ‘he bolts and butts like a mad bull.’”

“‘You have broken my hat,’ ejaculated a third.

“‘And my back,’ groaned a fourth.

“These and such like exclamations, accompanied with abundance of sour looks, were quite sufficient to assure me that my impetuous entrance at least was not an illusion. The church was that of — one which I had often visited, and with all whose usual approaches I was thoroughly acquainted. I was therefore but the more puzzled and confounded in attempting to account to myself for my suddenly assumed position in the very centre of the congregation this was, however, the least marvel in a day of wonders.

Henceforward life had lost for me all interest. I had beheld loveliness which was not of this earth, beside the remembrance of which all that I had ever seen of beauty, either in nature or in art, seemed gross, insipid, and charmless. The comeliness of this world was no more for me; day and night the same thought haunted me — day and night one dream, from which it was agony to awaken, overspread my soul. I was unsocial, changed, spirit-stricken, night and morning, moving and living in the irresistible fascination of the same absorbing, yearning vision. Day after day, ay, and night after night, I traced the streets and lanes of the city in the hope of finding again the scene of my strange adventures — my searches were all in vain. I described the street, all its peculiarities, but no one could direct me to it, no one had seen it. Still I wandered through the city with the almost hopeless object of meeting the old man — this hope was equally abortive — disappointment, still disappointment. I was miserable — my life was mere weariness. I wandered on, a stranger to the pleasures and to the interests of men; none knew of the unearthly passion which wasted me; I neither had nor wished to have a companion; mysteries had revealed themselves to me — mysteries which men could not behold and be happy. Hour after hour, day after day, week after week, wore on in one long, all-absorbing, unsatisfied wish. I knew that the beautiful being, the worship of whom was wearing me away, could not be of this world; but fear I had none respecting her; there was indeed awe, but no fear, no revulsion.

“I seldom slept, but when I did, my slumbers were broken by a thousand fantastic dreams, but all more or less horrible. In these visions the foreground was ever occupied by the beautiful subject of my waking thoughts but darkly lurking in some obscure corner, or suddenly crossing my sight when I least remembered him, came the abhorred monk, scaring away the lovely illusion, and startling me into broad wakefulness again. After such dreams, troubled and checkered with terror though they were, the strange passion, which had now become the essence of my being, would return upon me with redoubled vehemence; existence had become to me one fevered, unsatisfied wish — a burthen too heavy for me to bear. One morning I started from one of those visions which continually broke my rest; as I opened my eyes, I distinctly saw some dark shapeless thing glide like a snake from my pillow down the side of the bed, where I lost sight of it. Hardly knowing why, I sprang upon the floor, and to my unutterable horror I beheld peering from under the bed, the face of the demon monk. With a yell of despairing terror I howled, ‘In God’s name avaunt;’ and clasping my hands over my eyes I stood fixed and freezing in an agony of horror, not daring to expose myself to the terrors of a second gaze. I stood locked in this tremendous catalepsy, until my servant entering the chamber more than an hour after, recalled me to myself.

“‘I see it, I see it all,’ thought I, as with the excitement of madness I paced up and down my chamber — ‘I know it, I am under the influence of Satan — in the power of the tormentor. Oh, God! is there no passage of escape? is there no refuge from this Satanic persecution? Must I waste away in strength of body and in the faculties of my mind, until body and soul perish for ever?’”

“Almost as I uttered this agonized appeal, a thought struck me as suddenly as if it had been suggested by another speaker — ‘Go present yourself to a priest; confess your sins in a penitent spirit, and he will give you good counsel in your present strait, and if on earth there be deliverance for you, it is thus.’ The thought had hardly presented itself, when I put it into execution. I went to an aged and holy man and made my shrift, and on the imposition of a certain penance, he gave me absolution. I told him all I had suffered, and asked his advice under the peculiar and horrible case. Having heard me attentively, the good old man told me to be of good cheer.

“‘My son,’ said he, ‘thou hast experienced one of those assaults of the evil one which we, who sit in the confessional, are often told of — ay, while the giddy unconscious world is scouting the very possibility of such things. Strangely, too, it is, that as in thy case, my child, it generally happens that those who come hither for counsel under such terrors as those which have so long haunted thee, are from among the gay fashionable votaries of pleasure, whose chief characteristic it is to lead the way in ridiculing

all belief in such influences, and too often in covert derision of religion itself. Watch and pray, my son — by no consent of thine own invite the adversary; purify thy conscience by frequent confession; trust in the mercy of Heaven; walk in the ways of life uprightly and humbly; mortify every foolish as well as every sinful desire; and if thou dost so, Satan will never possess thee, body or soul, in all time, hereafter for ever.’

“I returned much comforted and with singleness of heart; I endeavoured in all things to conform myself to the directions of the good priest, and thus day by day the delirium under which my rest, and strength, and faculties were declining, gradually melted away and almost disappeared.

“A month had passed away, and I had become in health and spirits like other men, my mind being now thoroughly released from its former wanderings. I entered at nightfall the church of — . I knew not what feeling impelled me in the choice. There were but few worshippers in the church, and my thoughts, no doubt misled by the associations with which my last visit to this place was connected, wandered far away from the subject on which you will say they ought to have been fixed. My attention was, however, recalled to the scene before me by a circumstance which I shall not soon forget. Two figures caught my eye, as it seemed to me, that of a male and of a female, but both wrapt in mantles so ample as effectually to conceal the limbs, and quite to overshadow the features of those who wore them; both had drawn the hoods of their cloaks over their heads. The instant my eye encountered these figures, a sudden conviction flashed upon my mind that they were those of the very objects of the search which had for so long absorbed me. Every moment served to confirm this conviction; and when I saw them rise and pass from the church it was with a fearful interest that I too arose and followed them. They passed into the street, now nearly dark, I still closely dogging their steps: when they had arrived there, after a short pause they separated, moving rapidly in opposite directions; without hesitation I followed the lighter of the two figures; inwardly convinced that it was in truth no other than that of the being whom most of all I should have shunned and dreaded. Through many streets I followed the light gliding form, with a fascination too deep for words; with a blind obedience still I followed it, until it passed beyond the precincts of the city, and as the figure entered the broad fields, now sleeping under the misty light of the moon, I suffered the distance which separated us to increase, so far as to avoid the immediate likelihood of detection to which a near pursuit, though unremarked among the throng of the city streets, would in this sequestered and open place, have exposed me. Cautiously and at some distance then I followed, until I saw the object of my curiosity pause under the boughs of some tall trees; and, throwing back the hood from her face, and suffering the cloak to fall upon the ground, seat herself gently upon a large grey stone which stood there, and crossing her arms pensively on her lap, gaze fixedly upward at the broad bright disc of the beautiful moon.

“I resolved now to ascertain the correctness of my suspicions; and resisting as well as I might the misgivings and fears which crossed my mind, I stole noiselessly along under the broad friendly shade of the majestic tree, beneath which she was seated. Under cover of some brushwood I crept noiselessly onward, until I had reached to within some ten or twelve steps of the mysterious figure. The countenance was raised a little; the dark silken hair, parted on the forehead, fell in luxuriant folds upon the white shoulders and heaving bosom of the beautiful being. I beheld the full lustrous eye beneath its long dark lashes, and the exquisite features all revealed in the pale light of the moon, and clothed in the witching tenderness of sadness. A single glance told me that I was not mistaken; the conviction smote upon my heart; for an instant its pulses were suspended, and a chill, like that of death, shot through my frame, and then through every artery the tingling life-blood sprang with a recoil as impetuous and sudden. It was she — the dreamed-of — the longed-for — the enchantress. I abandoned myself to the intoxication of the moment. With words of passionate madness I threw myself at her feet: she raised me up — her arms were around me.

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“Beautiful betrayer — passionately-beloved phantom — unearthly lover! — what have I done? I am a fear and wonder to myself. Are all thy tears and blushes a mockery, and can hell borrow the beauty and modesty of angels? Sweet terrible illusion, I will not curse thee: ’twas I — I and not thou who wooed these strange horrors — thou didst warn me — ay! fallen, lost for ever as thou wert, warn me in pity — with tears, and supplications, and shadowy threatenings implore and resist. Still night after night thy footsteps are my guide, thy smiles my life, thy bosom my pillow: the vital taper burns away — down, down, wasting in the fierce glare of fever. Where, where will end this agony of love and despair? Would to God that heart and brain were dust, so I might remember no more, and be at rest! But no, no, it may not be. Cruel, beautiful destroyer! thou wilt drink my life away sweetly, slowly, ever day by day. I am all thine own — heavier, heavier grows the dreary sleep. All men move around me strangers, and as far away from my world of existence as from the dimmest star that twinkles in the sky. I have but one companion, one interest, one object; ever within me dread and loathing wrestle against passionate love in eternal agony. Oh! God! whence art thou, beautiful destroyer? Thou wouldst not kill me for ever. There is pity — infinite pity — in thy words and looks — tenderness and sorrow ever in thy dark, soft, deadly eyes: thy sweet words, too, ever warning — ay! thou hast truly said. The grieved and vainly-resisting slave of others art thou — the unwilling thrall of agencies hated and feared, but from which never — never in time or eternity canst thou escape.

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“One evening, in the self same church, I saw the other figure stand with her again; I followed them forth, but vainly looked for her to separate from him when they had reached the street. Together the two figures walked quickly onward, I following. Twice or thrice she turned her head, and with hasty gestures stealthily warned me off. Still doggedly I pursued: they walked, I know not whither, through streets strange to me; and at length, like a dream, around me rose the objects which my memory had so carefully treasured — the dark, silent street whither the old man had led me months before — the long grass waving in the night breeze over the pavement — the dim, tall, mouldering palaces at both sides towering darkly against the deep blue sky of midnight, and all over-shone by the pale moon. The two shapes stopped by the selfsame stone porch which had given me entrance to the habitation so terribly remembered. Like one in a dream, without fear or purpose, I stepped lightly to the gate before they entered.

The old man (it was he) moved to meet me — bade me welcome a thousand times, and made me promise to come in with him. This I did eagerly, though I saw the girl who stood behind him wring her hands as if in sorrow. Glaring lights of many colours were streaming from the windows, and mirthful music, mixed with wild uproar like the mad gusts of a tempest, resounded from the distant chambers. Shadows too flitted and bounded across the casements. We entered the hall as before, the old man leading the way. As we moved around the girl whispered softly in my ear— ‘You are in mortal peril. For your soul’s sake eat nothing — drink nothing; speak to no being whom you do not know, and say to me no word of love, or you have perished everlastingly. They will have you. *He*(pointing to the old man) and a worse than he will torment you for ever. Guard against every look and word; trust not in your own strength, but elsewhere; be not terrified by their mockeries, and when you can escape, fly.’

“Still with a dull recklessness I followed the old man, and mounted with him a broad marble staircase. As we ascended, the sounds became louder and fiercer. Loud barbaric music, mingled with fierce bursts of maniac laughter — Bacchanalian shouts, and long-drawn yells, as it seemed of agony, along with the continuous shuffling and pounding of feet upon the floors, produced a combination of noises which few could have heard without terror. I paused for a moment at the door, and then, summoning my utmost resolution, I entered. The spectacle before me was one which, while consciousness remains, I can never forget. A vast chamber, lighted dazzlingly with a thousand lamps, or rather stars, for they were not supported nor suspended by any thing, but glowed, flickered, and sported, separate and self-sustained, rolling and eddying high in air — expanding, and contracting, and yielding in glorious succession all the most splendid colours which imagination can conceive. Beneath this gorgeous and ever-shifting illumination a vast throng of shapes were moving — all enacting, but with the courteous observations and jollity of a festive meeting. Some glided to and fro with courtly ease, but bearing upon their lifeless faces the fearful stamp of sin and eternal anguish; others sate looking on, their fixed features writhed into smiles which, but to dream of, would appal the fancy for days; others, with ghastly idiotic grimaces, made hideous music from strange instruments, which panted and quivered, and writhed like living things in agony; others leaped, and danced, and howled, and glared like the very fiends of madness; and all formed a crowd of such terrific and ghastly horror as words cannot even faintly shadow forth. I felt like one under the enchantment of opium: I feared nothing: I revelled in the horrors among which I was plunged: an intoxication too strong for body and mind was upon me. Among these appalling and tremendous sights I beheld close by me, with fierce rapture, the beautiful form of the mysterious being who had won my very soul. I spoke I know not what words of passion, and she, with grief and horror in her face, said softly to me —

“‘Speak to me no more of love, as you would save your soul alive. In sin and sorrow my lot is fixed for ever. Beware how you court me here. I strive to save you. We are not all alike. I am not as these: I have mercy: I would deliver you: but these are stronger than I. The adversary has called me from my mournful dreams to work his will. They will have you — they will have you. Know you who they are?’”

“‘I spoke again, I know not what. Beware — once more beware,’ said she softly. ‘See you not that these are in torment and hatred? You know what they are. If you regard not my counsel you will be among them, and of them in eternity. You are in mortal peril — beware.’”

“Again, in wayward madness, I spoke.

“‘The time draws nigh,’ said she, while death-paleness overspread her cheeks. ‘I foresaw this. I dreaded it. The time draws nigh — my mission will be ended. They will let me go to my quiet; but you they will possess and keep in the bondage of hell — in hatred and agony for ever and ever. It is too late now. You have spoken the word. I am going hence, where you will see me no more.’”

“As she thus spoke, a cloudy indistinctness overspread the pale beautiful vision, and she began slowly and mournfully to recede from me. Stung with horror and agony at the sight, I cast myself before the fading form.

“‘Stay, stay, beautiful, beloved illusion,’ I said; ‘leave me not, oh, leave me not alone — I can love none other — I am your slave, your worshipper — I am yours for ever — God be my witness.’”

“As I ended the sentence, a yelling crash like the roar of ten thousand gigantic bells stunned my ears — total darkness swallowed every object, and my senses forsook me.

*

“I was found in the morning by the sexton of — , senseless, bruised, and covered with blood and foam, lying in the great aisles of that building. Since then I have been, you will say, mad — I say, the sport of other souls than my own — a blind, desperate instrument of hell, wending onward to an eternal doom which no imaginable power can avert. This consciousness of inevitable fate has been my companion ever since then, and it has taught me to despise opinion, virtue, vice — to trample on religion, and to laugh at punishment.

“Satan, whose I am, had chosen me for himself, to do his work even from the first. I am one with him, and he with me; and when I die, will merge forever into that dark mind. Think you, then, I care whether death come to-day, or tomorrow, or the next day? It must arrive soon; and then —

“Now, father, I have confessed enough, and you are welcome to tell my shrift to all the world. Absolve me now; and if you send me to heaven, I’ll give you credit for a wonder-worker when we meet.”

So saying, he laughed loud and bitterly.

*

He is to die tomorrow in the Place of St. Mark. They are building the scaffold. All are anxious to see the celebrated bravo and bandit.

They say that he has killed more than two hundred men in various broils and actions with his own hand. The caitiff mob of Venice admires the gigantic ruffian.

“Spalatro,” say they, “was a great man — a grand robber — a tremendous bravo. There will not soon again be such another dagger in Venice.”

*

It is over — the axe has fallen — the wretched sinner has passed from the world he so much abused. He spoke to the people from the scaffold, and all in mockery and jibes. The giddy crowd applauded him. When he had done speaking, and before the executioner was ready, of a sudden, and for the last time, a fit seized him; he cried out with a loud voice. The devil cast him down, and tore him. While he lay struggling on the planks the signal was made, and at two blows the head was severed from the body.

*

Thus ends the narrative of honest Giacomo. Whether or not he believed the tale I cannot tell: he certainly wrote it carefully out from end to end in his fair tall hand. For myself, I have little doubt that the story contains a pretty accurate detail of the successive attacks of *delirium tremens* which the drunken excesses of the wretch Spalatro were calculated to induce; for it is but giving the devil his due to admit, that it is not his usual practice to have young men to supper with a view to get off his daughters. I confess, too, that, under all the circumstances, I am strongly inclined to think that “the *old man*” who figures in the foregoing narrative, (and whom I take to be identical with the *old boy*) ought to have consummated his persecution of the poor highwayman by an action for breach of promise of marriage, which would certainly lie in such a case. Perhaps, however, the devil showed his good sense in preferring his own fireside to venturing into our courts of law for a remedy. However, my dear Harry, joke as we may, it is not easy, no nor possible, altogether to extract from the mind its inborn affection for the marvellous. Philosophy does but teach us the extent of our ignorance (I think I saw that somewhere or other before, but no matter). Do the dead return from the grave? Do strange influences reveal to mortal eye the shadowy vistas of futurity? Can demoniac agencies possess the body as of old, and blast the mind? What are these things that we call spectral illusions, dreams, madness? All around us is darkness and uncertainty. To what thing shall we say I understand thee? All is doubt — all is mystery; in short, in the words of our poetic countrymen— “It’s all botheration from bottom to top.”

Yours faithfully, though far away,
The Translator.